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Kensuke Tanabe was born in Ikeda-City, Osaka-prefecture, in 1963. He began working for Nintendo in April 1986. Since the NES era he has worked on games in developer Shigeru Miyamoto's group, and now works on many second-party projects.

Some of his credits include Super Mario Bros. 2 for the NES, The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past for the Super NES, Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire for Nintendo 64, Metroid Prime for the Nintendo GameCube system, Chibi-Robo and Mario vs. Donkey Kong: Minis March Again! for the Nintendo DS family of systems, and Excite Truck, Super Paper Mario, Punch-Out!!, Metroid Prime: Trilogy and Donkey Kong Country Returns for the Wii console. Tanabe also served as producer for multiple Nintendo 3DS titles, including the Freakyforms: Your Creations, Alive! and Dillon's Rolling Western series, as well as Paper Mario: Sticker Star.

Tanabe graduated from the Visual Concept Planning Department of Osaka University of Arts.